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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how to teach speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) to advocate for themselves regarding their health. It offers two stories about young immigrants who appear to be having a negative physical and emotional response to their lives in the United States. It presents a list of questions to determine students' comprehension and provides suggested topics for class discussion. It also offers ideas for ESL speakers if they need health care but do not have insurance (e.g., go to a free clinic and use a payment plan). The paper presents the following: tips on how to act and what to say in the doctor's office or hospital (e.g., ask questions, take a friend, and make informed decisions); questions for the doctor about treatment (e.g., what the diagnosis is and what the test results mean); questions for the doctor about surgery (e.g., what the name of the surgery is and why the surgery is needed); suggestions for dealing with medicines (e.g., ask the doctor to write the prescription clearly and inform the doctor about current medications); and questions to ask the doctor about medicines (e.g., what the medicine is and why it is necessary); (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.) (SM)

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Health Care Self-Advocacy and Adult ESL Students

VAILL-ESL, Arlington, VA

July 30, 2001

MATERIALS

Presenter: Kate Singleton, Adult and Community Education,
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Leila's Story

Leila is a young wife and mother. She works eight hours a day and then cooks, cleans and takes care of her kids at home. She wants to do everything very well, but sometimes it is very stressful for her. Recently she cries a lot and thinks about how easy life was before she came to the U.S. Sometimes her heart beats very fast, she has trouble breathing and she feels very frightened. When she goes to bed, she cannot sleep because she is thinking too much about everything. She is afraid she cannot do the right things for her children, her husband and her job. She feels very tired and nervous all the time.

Comprehension.
Write YES or NO.

1. Is Leila married?
2. Is she a parent?
3. Does she work part-time?
4. Does she relax after work?
5. Does she feel sad sometimes?
6. Can she sleep well?

Write a short answer.

7. What happens when Leila tries to sleep? _____
8. What does Leila think about her past life? _____
9. What are the symptoms of Leila's problem? _____

_____

_____

10. What is Leila afraid of? _____

_____

Discuss your opinions with the class. Write your ideas.

11. What do you think is wrong with Leila? _____
12. Did you ever know someone who felt like Leila? _____
13. If someone feels like this, what can they do to feel better? _____

_____

_____

14. Where can someone go in your community for help? _____

_____

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Juan's Story

Juan does not feel very good. He doesn't have much energy, although he sleeps a lot. He feels lonely, but he lives with his family. He doesn't feel like talking with his wife or kids. He usually loves to play soccer, but now soccer is not interesting for him. Every day Juan goes to work, and when he comes home he just sleeps. He started feeling like this when his mother passed away last year. He thought it would get better, but it didn't.

Comprehension.
Write YES or NO.

1. Does Juan feel OK?
2. Does sleep help him feel better?
3. Does he live with his wife and children?
4. Does he speak much with them?
5. Does he like playing soccer now?
6. Does he play with his kids after work?

Write a short answer.

7. What does Juan do after work?_____
8. When did Juan start feeling bad?_____
9. What are the symptoms of Juan's problem?_____

_____

_____

10. What did he think about his problem?_____

_____

Discuss your opinion with your class. Write your ideas.

What do you think is wrong with Juan?_____

Did you ever know someone who felt like Juan?_____

If someone feels like this, what can they do to feel better?_____

_____

_____

Where can someone go in your community for help?_____

_____

_____

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Paying for health care if you do not have insurance

- Is there a low-cost or free clinic near your home? Find the phone number and call to see if you qualify for treatment there. Sometimes you need to wait a few weeks for your first appointment because the clinics are busy.
- If you do not have insurance, sometimes (not always!) regular doctors charge less for uninsured people's treatment. You need to ask at the doctor's office or hospital. Sometimes no one tells you if you don't ask.
- If you have a big bill that you cannot pay at one time, ask if you can have a **payment plan**. With a payment plan, you pay the same amount each month (for example, $50) until you finish paying everything off.
- If you do not pay a medical bill, usually your bill will go to a **collections agency**. This is very serious! Collections agencies give you a **bad credit rating** in computer systems that banks and many other businesses can check. If you do not pay the collections agency, you will have bad credit. With bad credit, you cannot buy a house, car, or college education. You cannot rent a new apartment. You cannot get a credit card. You cannot receive a loan from a bank, and sometimes you cannot open a bank account. It is very difficult to fix bad credit.

In the doctor's office/hospital:

- SPEAK UP. ASK QUESTIONS! Doctors want patients to be interested in their **treatment**. In the US doctors expect you to make decisions together with them.
- If a doctor is busy, he or she sees the patient for only 10 minutes. Think of some questions before you go to the appointment so you get the information you need.
- Take a friend with you who can help you ask questions and understand the doctor. Sometimes a friend is better than someone in your family, because a family member may not be comfortable speaking about your health and body.
- Make **INFORMED DECISIONS**. This means learn all you can about your problem and its possible treatments before you decide what treatment to have. Ask questions to doctors, nurses, other people who had your problem. If possible, read information about it in books and on the internet.
- Be ready to tell the doctor what **symptoms** you have and how long you have had the symptoms.
- In the US, be ready to tell the doctor your **family's medical history**. What big health problems did your parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters have? This helps the doctor know what to check for in you.
- If you are in the hospital, **talk with the doctor or nurse** before you go home about what you should do and what medicines you should take

when you leave the hospital. Make sure you understand everything. **If you don't understand**, **ask more questions**.

- If you don't want to take a medicine or have an operation, you can ask the doctor if there is an **alternative treatment.** If you are not sure that surgery is the right thing for you, you can ask a different doctor for a **second opinion.** (You have to pay both doctors!)
- If you need to go to the hospital for an operation, try to go to a hospital that does this operation a lot.
- If you don't hear **test results** in the time the doctor tells you, call the doctor to check on the results.

Some Questions for the Doctor about your Treatment

1. What is the diagnosis?
2. What treatment do you recommend?
3. Why is this treatment better?
4. Are there any other possible treatments?
5. Why do I need this test?
6. What do the test results mean?
7. Are there some foods I should not eat?

Some Questions for the Doctor about your Surgery

1. What is the name of the surgery?
2. What will happen in the surgery?
3. Why do I need the surgery?
4. What problems can happen in the surgery?
5. What should I do before the surgery?
6. What kind of anesthesia will I have?
7. How long is the surgery?
8. What will happen after the operation?
9. How will I feel after the operation?
10. What should I do after the surgery?
11. What shouldn't I do after the surgery?
12. What follow-up care will I need after I leave the hospital?

Medicines:

- If you cannot read the doctor's handwriting on the prescription, ask him to write it again clearly.
- Tell the doctor your allergies to medicines and side effects you had from medicines in the past.
- Write a list to show the doctor or hospital staff what medicines you are taking and how much you take. If you cannot write it, put your medicines in a bag and take them to the doctor with you.
- Check before you leave the pharmacy that you got the correct medicine and that you understand how to take it. It is ok to ask the pharmacist questions.

Questions to ask the doctor about your medicine

1. What is this medicine?
2. Why am I taking it?
3. What does this medicine do?
4. How long do I need to take it?
5. When will I start feeling better?
6. What are ok side effects of the medicine?
7. What are bad side effects of the medicine?
8. What side effects do I need to call you for?
9. Is it ok to drink alcohol with this medicine/this condition?
10. Do I need to come back and have the doctor check my medicine?
11. Here are the names and doses of other medicines I'm taking now. Is it ok to take the new medicine with them? (Include **over-the-counter** medicines, prescriptions, vitamins, **herbs**, from the United States and other countries.)

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